


Meaning vs. Objective Interpretation:
Existentialism in the Secondary School

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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PREFACE

Existentialism, although gaining its fame, or perhaps notoriety, during the post-World War II period, can be traced in its expression of the meaning of life as far back as the story of Abraham and Isaac in the earliest book in the Bible and although perhaps not fully articulated in the expected existential language, leading thinkers have shouted its themes for hundreds of years. This finding is no surprise to those of us who recognize that humans do not simply begin contemplating, questioning, and analyzing their purpose in this world because philosophers attach a supposed definitive word to its processes.

Philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger, and many artists, whether writers, artists, sculptors, or composers, have beautifully illuminated the facets of existence or have offered their own personal, permanent accounts of a segment of their experiences that were meaningful to them and in turn can be meaningful for others. I am not naive enough to believe that the existentialism debate will end here, but it is my intention to establish that there is substantial validity in the study of existentialism not only for the intrinsic values alone, but also as a lens through which to view literature in the secondary school.

After over twenty years of personal interest in and study of existence writers, Dr. Paul Schumacher decided to combine his lifetime study with his nineteen years experience as a professor of literature and composition to write a book entitled Existence Literature: A Study in Humanities. Having had Dr. Schumacher as a professor for a Humanities sequence of

classes offered by the Honors College at Ball State University, I was able to see how he integrated the study of existence with the study of various types of literature. In addition, having worked for him the past year and a half as he compiled, edited, and completed much of his book, I have gained a clearer perspective of the complex ideas and philosophies of existentialism. Ralph Harper in the preface of his book, Existentialism: A Theory of Man, claims that he is indebted to Reverend M.C. D'Arcy of Oxford University for opening up to him "the prospect of an existentialism not of nihilism but of love." I must echo his words of indebtedness to Dr. Schumacher.

This thesis will, necessarily, be divided into two distinct sections. The first will examine the works and theories of several existential thinkers. Their observations will be included to validate the approaches that will be suggested by the author. It will also address various established means of interpreting literature and the problems created by them. Incorporated in this will be a continual reference to the approach Dr. Schumacher proposes in his thoughtful text, specifically in the first two chapters.

Educational theorists traditionally examine inadequacies in educational systems in such book-length reform reports as "A Nation at Risk" and "High School." Unfortunately, they identify the problems without offering practical solutions for the classroom teacher. To avoid this in my own examination, the second section of my thesis will demonstrate the practical application of existential literature in the English classroom. A two-week unit plan is outlined in detail using

Dr. Schumacher's first two chapters, "About People" and "Sense of Self." This unit plan is included to show the exciting possibilities for this new study in the secondary English classroom.

In the whirlwind of gathering the 32, 36, or 42 credits (depending on the requirements of the state government) needed for graduation, students on the secondary level characteristically fail to comprehend the core subjects as thoroughly as educators would like for them to. Too many times, it appears that depth is sacrificed for breadth. The students pull from their memories the memorized, didactic bits of texts, short stories, notes, theorems, algebraic equations, and vocabulary. TheodoreSizer in his book, Horace's Compromise, aptly depicts this situation by observing that the "student sees the curriculum neither as a coherent whole nor as as a set of academic imperatives arising from a cluster of subjects" (TheodoreSizer, Horace's Compromise, Houghton Mifflin, 1984, p. 92). Although many reformers have for years suggested their theories for eliminating this cyclical process in education, we must realize that students have always had the capabilities for achieving much more, but have been conditioned to the expectations of their educators who rarely see beyond their stacks of ungraded exams, their unorganized bulletin boards, and the confining walls of the classroom. With rare exception, students are encouraged to look in and narrow their perceptions or interpretations of a particular subject rather than to look up and out as many of the existential thinkers establish as an almost natural response to the experiences of existence.

Together, students, teachers, the established curriculum, and rigid thought patterns concerning pedagogy have eliminated a consideration for existence. Albert North Whitehead admonishes such a limited approach to education in his oft-quoted

statement, academic learning is "one-eyed" if it "deals with only half the evidence provided by human experience." Especially in the study of the Humanities, perhaps the richest field for the possibilities of looking up and out, educators have chosen or have been forced to resort to the most objective means of teaching both literature and composition. English journals and conference workshops are inundated with articles addressing this very problem. Professionals recognize the dilemma but have become paralyzed in their abilities to find a viable way in which to deal with the inadequacies of a strictly objective interpretation/teacher-tell-the-student the answer method.

Dr. Schumacher has managed to simplify, without destroying the foundations, the very technical and overwhelming aspects of existentialism and combine that with a marvelously workable study of literature. A close look at his study reveals the significant parallels between the proclamations of existential thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Jaspers and the themes of much of our literature. Kierkegaard's statement of complete frustration, "It is the misfortune of our age that it has too much knowledge, that it has forgotten what it means to exist" prophetically reflects much of society's predicament today, particularly those laden with the "things" of this world (Ralph Harper, Existentialism: A Theory of Man, Harvard University Press 1948, p. 45). Kierkegaard's work was in response to Hegel's philosophical relativism, but he was not alone in his revolt against the abstract scientism of his age. Many existential writers prefer to address in their philosophies the human qualities in this world.

Karl Jaspers defends what he establishes as a huge chasm between philosophy and science as he makes clear the distinction between science and philosophy by saying very succinctly that "science is not philosophy, for the objective knowledge supplied by any of its branches relates always to what appears within one specific and narrowly circumscribed area of facts purged of values and uncontaminated by moral criteria" (Charles Wallraff, Karl Jaspers, Princeton University Press 1970, p. 64). In dealing with the humanities, it should be obvious that the very substance of literature, art, and music cannot be and is not void of moral and ethical considerations. Jaspers urges man not to confuse "the knowledge that he can prove with the convictions by which he lives" (Wallraff, p. 64). The convictions by which people live infiltrate every part of their being and influence the words that they write, the expressions of love that they make, the relationships in which they choose to become involved, and the everyday decisions of life. The existentialists oppose that which negates these convictions in life, which cannot be tested by scientific theory.

In The Challenge of Existentialism John Wild describes a continual attention to "abstract theorizing" as the breakdown of modern philosophy. Writing years after Jaspers, this writer again eloquently iterates that philosophy has become "uncertain of the existence of things, and has thought of experience as though it were a thin, unsubstantial flux of pictures on a mental screen" (John Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism, Indiana University Press 1955, p. 21). Although some existentialist thinkers disagree on the exact role of experience in life, it is imperative

to them that experience be at the very heart when considering humans' very existence. The existentialists try at the very outset of their work in philosophizing to reunite philosophy and the "active life and the sound sense of the common man" (Wild, p. 21).

Education as well has suffered breakdowns in terms of what teachers and schools should be accomplishing. Some reformers feel that our educational process has never been truly concerned with the welfare of the "common man," but has continued stagnantly in the tradition of what schools have always been. Not unlike the existentialists who challenge the threats of scientism, many educators are beginning to challenge the threats of the processes which contribute to below average SAT scores, high risk students who will never graduate, functional illiteracy, and students who are unable to grasp anything beyond a literal level. Students' critical analysis skills falter because they simply are never challenged or encouraged to employ them.

"Education by Criticism," a journal article in the English Journal by Stephen L. Tanner deals specifically with helping students to develop critical thinking skills. Tanner strongly believes that the literary studies occurring in the classroom are simply not adequate enough to even allow the students to see the possibilities of what is available to them as readers of literature. Criticism is necessary in the humanities, for they do not "seek to offer analysis without synthesis, description without evaluations, or abstractions without feeling" (Tanner, p. 22). Similarly, the existentialists would echo this position in their own evaluation of existence. Their foundation lies in the "humanness of this world" which makes them ultimately humanistic. I agree with Bate in

extraction of concrete meaning, then the reading of literature becomes an abstraction. Probst quotes Rosenblatt when establishing that this extraction of meaning indicates that it can be "lifted out of the text, the work is then used up--through interpretation literature is turned into an item for consumption" (Probst, p. 34).

The study of existence reveals positively that an objective knowledge of existence is impossible. To objectify our existence is to distort it. Again quoting from John Wild, he implies that "to understand anything as a mere object is to squeeze the existence out of it, to degrade it and misunderstand it" (Wild, p. 224). Existence and all that it exudes, background, beliefs, values, family, choices, emotions, cannot be separated from life. Those very real parts of existence that make each person a unique individual in this world become intricate parts of his being. In fact, serious psychological problems are often the result of a person who attempts to distort an aspect of his existence. he no longer can see his actions in life "on the whole."

Many students steer clear of courses they know will require them to be subjective in their approach to some subject. At least in a Math class, they feel they can always count on $2 + 2 = 4$. Sitting in a class dealing with the humanities, students still want a poem, short story, or novel to be "solved." They do not know how to position themselves over and above the literature, and they are not willing to reveal any part of their uniqueness as they come together with a piece of literature. This "coming together" is what promotes subjectivity. Although Sartre is not included in the same vein as the existential thinkers considered here, his statement borrowed from Kierkegaard, that "subjectivity must be the starting point" seems most appropriate

Tanner's article that "to be humanistic is to be aware of basic human values, to prize them as something more than idle abstractions to talk about, and to evaluate things in the light of the ends that these values characterize."

Literature as dealt with in the high school classroom is undeniably an expression of human values, however diverse they may be. Most would automatically contend that when dealing with issues of the heart and human values, subjectivity would have to serve as the crucial critical element. Involved with subjectivity, in the eyes of the existentialist thinkers, is a personal sense of meaning. Each existing person in his "dasein," using Heidegger's term, participates in the larger "world" but also has sense of a personal "world." This not only allows for subjectivity but also demands it. Literature classes have negated this subjectivity in their critical study of a written art. Yes, teachers may ask "What does this poem mean?" but the discussion quickly diminishes when the teacher proceeds to prescriptively designate the "meaning" provided for her by the teacher's manual.

Offering an insightful alternative to the objective interpretation discussed above, Robert Probst examines the critical study of literature, establishing what I believe the existential philosophers would applaud in terms of the development of the self while encountering the experience of literature. In this article he insists that "the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening" (Probst, p. 34). If this proposition is accepted as valid, then the objective interpretations falsely promoting meaning as this entity would interrupt the experiential qualities of literature. If the sole purpose of reading literature is turned into an

(Harper, p. 26). Even in a more traditional examination of literature and literary criticism, Danzinger and Johnson present two possible scenarios for arriving at the actual meaning of a text: either "only the author knows, or each reader must decide on the meaning for himself" (Danzinger and Johnson, Introduction to Literary Criticism, D.C. Heath and Company 1961, p. 3).

Pursuing the first of these seems somewhat futile and definitely not helpful in the quest for any type of understanding of the literary piece. The second, although it apparently lines up quite closely with a justification for subjectivity, must be carefully scrutinized before accepting it wholeheartedly.

In his book, Wallraff interprets Jaspers' defense of philosophy as opposed to science. He says that they cannot be considered the same, nor are their intentions the same. However, Jaspers does ultimately state that "philosophy depends upon science for knowledge that is uniquely reliable" (Wallraff, p. 64). He upholds that one should not exist without the other; they must work together and borrow from one another to be most effective. The findings of science, as objective as they may be, are necessary for philosophical world-orientation. As such then, I think the complete subjectivity approach in literature can be non-productive if totally removed from a sense of structure provided by an objective approach. Especially younger readers need a solid ground from which to grow. Establishing the important history of an author, the conditions under which a particular piece of literature was written, and the individual

structure of the work are all necessary means of uncovering the meaning of a particular piece of literature. As a teacher of existence literature, I would certainly include these somewhat traditional methods. If there is going to be a "coming together" of reader and literature, the reader's knowledge of important information will be crucial to the "dynamic happening" which hopefully will occur.

The risk of a teacher turning to pure subjectivism can be reduced by first giving attention to the importance of self in each individual student in the classroom. The majority of adolescents today lack self-esteem and confidence because of extremely low self-images. Their interpretation of self is only realized through the opinions and judgments of their often-cruel peers. Their personal decisions are too often guided by a desire to "fit in" regardless of the consequences. A study of existence literature can only serve to make the high school student more aware of his selfness, and according to Harper, "a new mode of understanding, feeling, and living emerges when a person begins to understand that the fact of his existence is tremendously important to him." (Harper, p. 20).

The meaning approach to existence literature will also confirm for the young reader that as Heidegger proposed, "to exist is always to be on the way" (John MacQuarrie, Martin Heidegger, John Knox Press, 1968, p. 12). On their day-to-day journey they will make new discoveries about themselves and others, they will enter into new experiences that could be life-changing, and they will grow to realize their true freedom. Objective interpretation cannot offer this wealth of possibilities for existence. In

using the method suggested in this paper and in Dr. Schumacher's book, students may realize that as Dr. Schumacher states in his "preface," "the artists compose out of their most passionate experiences, and the readers respond not only with affirmative words, but with committed choices and decisions." Through those choices and decisions, my hope is that students can finally proclaim that life for them is not a "possession but a possibility."

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PATTERN FOR TEACHING UNIT PLAN

1. Heading

- 1.1 Existence Literature
- 1.2 Senior year
- 1.3 Senior Honors Humanities Course for Gifted and Talented
- 1.4 Two weeks

2. Introduction

This unit is designed to be taught to a senior year Honors Humanities course. My class has 20 students. The students in my class are from middle-class to upper middle-class income backgrounds. None of my students has any physical handicaps. I have no discipline problems. All of the students are exceptionally motivated and have been blessed with exceptional intellectual abilities. These students demand more than the average challenges of a regular classroom which will explain the very advanced nature of the unit plan.

The class, up to this point, has been studying World Literature in the first semester of the Humanities sequence. This unit begins the second semester and the students' first glimpse of existential thought in a structured way. The lessons in this unit are based on the stories and questions provided in the class text, Existence Literature: A Study in Humanities by Dr. Paul Schumacher. The first couple of days before the beginning of this unit have been spent introducing the class, introducing myself, assigning a short autobiography for the students to write, and informing the students that I require they keep a weekly journal.

3. Learning Objectives

- 3.1 Students will begin to develop a sense of "community" in the classroom through open-ended discussion.
- 3.2 Students will be introduced to the subjective nature of philosophy.
- 3.3 Students will become familiar with questioning involved in this type of discussion and feel comfortable answering freely.
- 3.4 Students will sharpen their writing skills while applying critical thinking skills
- 3.5 Students will begin to use the ideas of existentialism in their writing (i.e. using terms adequately).
- 3.6 Students will be able to recognize the importance of their own views in this course.
- 3.7 Students will be able to adequately respond to the questions reflecting Didion's stream-of-consciousness writing in "On Going Home"
- 3.8 Students will recognize parallels and importance of journal writing in their own experience.
- 3.9 Students will be able to identify their most poignant or telling journal entry dealing with their response to their Lebenswelt.
- 3.10 Students will analyze the character of Andy in "I'm a Fool" without first discussing him as a class.
- 3.11 Students will recognize the importance of subjectivity in their study of literature.
- 3.12 Students will apply terms and ideas from their reading of "About People" to their analysis of literature.
- 3.13 Students will evaluate narrative techniques in fiction.

- 3.14 Students will begin to gain a clearer sense of themselves in relation to other people as they make judgments about Andy in "I'm a Fool."
- 3.15 Students will gain a working knowledge of the existential idea of self and the divisions that occur with the self.
- 3.16 Students will learn a different perspective on the historical flight of Charles Lindberg--they will be taken inside the cockpit.
- 3.17 Students will be able to distinguish between a historical account of a particular event and an existential, experiential account.
- 3.18 Students will recognize from visual representation the different existential views.
- 3.19 Students will recognize the invalid descriptions depicted in the visual aids provided.
- 3.20 Students will refine their abilities to apply the existential foundations to other areas in class.
- 3.21 Students will see the crucial role of freedom in existential thought.
- 3.22 Students will recognize that the self-knowledge addressed in "Sense of Self" may lead to a relative freedom.
- 3.23 Students will recognize that along with freedom comes responsibility.

4. Learning/Teaching Activities

As I stated in the introduction, these students present a greater challenge for the teacher because the teacher must be very careful to retain the students' interest in the material being taught. There is a careful balance, however, while maintaining interest, the teacher has to make sure the material does not go over the students' heads either. Student participation is vital to a class such as this one. The lesson plans in this unit reflect the teacher's earnest attempt to make the class student-centered rather than teacher-centered. Each week, the students can expect some continuity or consistency, but the course will not become static.

To begin, it is important to indicate that I will require students to make daily journal entries. At the beginning of the course, I will explain the procedure for their journal writing. Journals will be collected once a week, sometimes every two weeks, depending on the time schedule. To avoid the typical "grade-oriented," overly critical approach to reading students' writing, I will make very few critical remarks with red marker on their papers. This is free-thinking and personal writing for the students. It is intended to nurture the imaginative and fluent writing so often stifled by the attack of the red marker. Also, this provides an excellent opportunity for me to get to know the students better and on a more casual basis.

Students will be asked to write frequently outside of their journals as well. Students at this level need to be writing formally at least once a week if not two. Research consistently shows that this is one area contributing to students' low level of proficiency in writing. The writing assignments I assign will always deal in some way with the types of class activities and readings the students will be doing.

Reading assignments will be fairly rigorous. Students will have reading or writing assignments to complete every night except one. The discussions and assignments in class will greatly depend on their reading. Hence, in order to cover adequately class material, the students must complete a great deal of reading outside of class. Out of this extensive reading schedule will come discussion. Discussion will be absolutely crucial to this class. The lesson plans will reflect the amount of time that should be spent in discussion. The reflection and grouping of ideas promoted by discussion will be absolutely imperative in the study of existence literature.

Some creative activities will also be implemented to see what kind of response the students might have. Visual aids will be used in this process. When necessary or desirable throughout the course, films, outside reading assignments, field trips, slides, art work, etc. may be used to best facilitate learning.

Discussion/Presentation Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities

Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 1 of unit plan

Topic: The Nature of
Philosophy

Learning Objectives

Students will begin to develop a sense of "community"
in the classroom through open-ended discussion.

Students will be introduced to the subjective nature
of philosophy.

Students will become familiar with questioning involved
in this type of discussion and feel comfortable
answering freely.

Student discussion/Teacher intervention

Arrangements

The 20 students in class will be divided into three groups. Each of those groups will be in a circle. I will not be stationary but will travel from one group to another intervening to guide discussion and keep it going.

Motivation

My motivation for this discussion will be to try to promote a sense of community by making the students feel at ease. I will also tell them that they are not going to be "graded" for correct or incorrect answers. We are simply going to share feelings and attitudes concerning these questions. Too, I will tell them that their understanding and participation today indicates their future ability to excel in the class.

Procedure

Each group will receive a different set of questions. The three sets of questions will be as follows:

1. What is the chief end of man? What is the purpose of human life? What does it mean to be human?
2. What is truth? What is the source of truth? Is truth absolute or is it relative? Does man create truth or do man's actions in his environment discover truth?
3. What knowledge is of most worth? What is knowledge? What is the difference between knowledge and intelligence? What is the source of intelligence?

Introduction to discussion

The questions you have are designed to have you begin thinking about the very nature of philosophy--that with which we will be dealing for the

rest of the semester. You will all have different ideas and opinions about these questions, but that is all right. Remember that you all bring different backgrounds, beliefs, and values to this discussion--don't let this hinder your discussions.

In the first 30-40 minutes each group will confer about their questions, with one person in each group recording the responses.

In the remaining 15-20 minutes the groups will share their responses with the class.

Assignment

Read "About People" in the text and the Definition section following.

Performance Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities

Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 2 of the unit plan

Topic: Writing in
response to
"About People"

Learning Objectives

Students will sharpen their writing skills while applying critical thinking skills

Students will begin to use the ideas of existentialism in their writing, using the terms and concepts to develop their own perceptions

Students will be able to recognize the importance of their own views in this course.

Materials, Equipment, Facilities, etc.

Students will be working individually. They will need their text Existence Literature: A Study in Humanities, plenty of paper, and a pen. Dictionaries, thesauruses, and other source materials will be available.

Arrangements

Students will work individually as I want a purely personal response to this material early on to detect their levels of understanding so that adjustments can be made accordingly.

Motivation

Writing will probably not initially seem interesting to the students. I will try to motivate them by reassuring them that they can use the text as a source. In other words, they are not expected to recall all of the reading on their own in order to write their responses; it will not serve as a quiz. The most significant motivation will be telling them that in addition to working in class with initial help from me, they will be able to take home their work and turn it in the next day.

Directions to be given regarding writing assignment

1. Students are to thoroughly read the definitions provided after the introduction "About People."
2. I will then ask them to select one of the questions which they feel best describes their reading of "About People."
3. Once they have decided, I will ask them to write a defense for why they feel the way they do. They will be expected to support their defense according to the reading thus far.

Concluding Summary, Directions, Caution etc.

Length of the paper should be approximately 2-4 pages. It does not have to be typed. Write paper according to correct grammar, punctuation, organization, and spelling rules.

Assignment

Finish papers to be turned in tomorrow.
Read "On Going Home" by Joan Didion in text.
Continue journal work.

Presentation/Discussion Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities

Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 3 of unit plan

Topic: Joan Didion's
"On Going Home"
and journal writing
in relation to "People"

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to adequately respond to the questions reflecting Didion's stream-of-consciousness writing in "On Going Home"

Students will recognize parallels and importance of journal writing in their own experience.

Students will be able to identify their most poignant or telling journal entry dealing with their response to their Lebenswelt.

Arrangements

Students will remain in one group but will be placed in a circle to facilitate better discussion. They will have their texts handy for reference purposes.

Motivation

Knowing that some students will be puzzled by their reading of this essay, I will motivate the class by assuring them that our discussion will help to guide them into confirming a sense of understanding.

Discussion

Questions from text are as follows:

1. Define "oblique," "inarticulate," "lassitude," "fragmentation."
2. When Joan Didion refers to home, which home is she talking about. Does your family "talk in code" like hers? Does code language reveal one's Lebenswelt?
3. Joan Didion says that she meets her past "at every turn, around every corner, inside every cupboard." Is that a true description of a person's past, or can one block it out? Can you make a list of "keepsakes" that unfold your past as she lists "a bathing suit," "a letter of rejection," "an aerial photograph," and "three hand-painted teacups."
4. Joan Didion says of her one-year old baby that she is an "open and trusting child, unprepared for and unaccustomed to the ambushes of family life." Does this comment, with others, reveal her deep feelings toward family, love as security, the possibility or impossibility of genuine sharing and supportive communication?
5. How much of Joan Didion's "inside story" is revealed in this essay?

Presentation

The last question about the "inside story" will provide a perfect opportunity for me to begin connecting this idea to the students' journal writing. Didion's description does allow us to see the "inside story."

It also provides for her the chance to reveal this very real, often indescribable phenomenon. Because my students will be required to keep a journal, I want to reveal to them the possibilities for their own descriptions.

To break down some barriers that may be present and to serve as a role model for the students, I will read one of my journal entries (maybe just an excerpt).

Then I will tell the students that I want them to select one of their journal entries which best represents their description of others and how they as individuals perceive their relationships to others.

Assignment

Prepare journal entry for next day.
Read "I'm a Fool" in text.

Discussion/Presentation Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities

Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 4 in unit plan

Topic: Writing on Anderson's
"I'm a Fool" and narrative
techniques

Learning objectives

Students will analyze the character of Andy in "I'm a Fool" without first discussing him in class.

Students will recognize the importance of subjectivity in their study of literature.

Students will apply terms and ideas from their reading of "About People" to their analysis of literature.

Motivation

The motivation for this lesson will stem from the fact that students get tired of teachers always just lecturing about the meaning of the story the day after it is read. Today, they will be asked to first formulate some of their own opinions in writing before it is discussed as an entire class.

Directions for assignment

The first half of the period will be designated for students to write in response to the following questions from the text.

1. Why is the Swipe so impressed with "swell names" like Walter Mathers, Lucy Wesson, and Miss Woodbury?
2. Does he allow his "world" to dominate, even enslave him?
3. Does he ever rise above the forces and attitudes of his age and culture? Does he ever achieve authenticity?

These will be collected after about 30 minutes.

Presentation

Before continuing the discussion of Anderson's "I'm a Fool" on Friday, I will present a few important ideas about the effective use of narration in fiction.

1. Different types of narration: first person, third person, omniscient, limited omniscient, stream of consciousness.
2. Why authors in fiction would choose each type of narration--when would they be most effective.
3. How does the point-of-view of the narrative affect the overall understanding of the literature.

Assignment

Think about the narration in "I'm a Fool" and be ready to discuss it tomorrow at the beginning of class.

Discussion Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 5 of unit plan

Topic: Discussion of Anderson's
"I'm a Fool"

Learning Objectives

Students will evaluate narrative techniques in fiction
as related to a central character's inability to
perceive himself honestly

Students will begin to gain a clearer sense of themselves
in relation to other people as they make judgements
about Andy in "I'm a Fool"

Arrangements

Students will be in a circle

Motivation

The students will have to use the evaluative processes employed today throughout the whole course, so they will be encouraged to develop them as strongly as they can now. Also, I will remind them that a large part of their overall "grade" in this course depends on participation. It is crucial to the success of the course and what we can accomplish.

Discussion

Questions from text will be as follows:

1. In the short story "I'm a Fool," Sherwood Anderson shows why fiction writers have such a privileged position from which to accurately describe people. Unlike protective individuals, fiction writers can speak with absolute honesty. They are "free" to describe people as they see them, without damaging their personal reputation or revealing their cherished secrets. Through Anderson's characterization of Andy, for example, he shows how this uneducated boy looks at others, at the world, at his own period of time in history, and at his own place in life. What does Anderson reveal about Andy that Andy would not like to reveal about himself? About his ignorance and lack of education? About his self-justification and rationalization? About his foolish deception and lying?
2. Is the Swipe's attitude toward college educations contradictory? At one time he says "The young fellow was a nice guy, all right. He was the kind maybe that goes to college and then comes to be a lawyer..." Another time he says, "You can stick your colleges up your nose for all me." Does the Swipe even understand why he is so ambivalent? Does he understand that his ambivalent attitude is really self-justification-- putting himself in the best possible light even though

it requires outright contradiction?

3. Does Andy sound like an ordinary person--ordinary enough for the reader to identify with and learn from--and as a result make some private commitments to ambition, honesty, and self-respect?

As a final question as much for thought as discussion, I will ask:

Is Andy's situation hopeless?

Does the author want the reader to believe that his situation is hopeless?

Does Andy believe that his situation is hopeless?

Assignment

Read "Sense of Self" introduction and definition section.

Performance Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 6 of the unit plan Topic: Writing in response
to "Sense of Self"

Learning Objectives

Students will sharpen their writing skills while applying critical thinking skills

Students will continue to use the ideas of existentialism in their writing using the terms and concepts to develop their own perceptions

Students will be able to recognize the importance of their own views in this course

Materials, Equipment, Facilities, etc.

Students will be working individually. they will need their text Existence Literature: A Study in Humanities, plenty of paper, and a pen. Source materials will be available.

Arrangements

Students will work individually.

Motivation

Students will not be expected to recall all of the reading on their own in order to write their responses; it will not be a quiz. As usual, they will be able to take their work home for a more thorough attention to their work.

Directions to be given regarding writing assignment

1. Students are to thoroughly read the definitions provided after the introduction "Sense of Self."
2. I will then ask them to select one of the questions which they feel best describes their reading of "Sense of Self."
3. Once they have decided, I will ask them to write a defense for why they feel the way they do. They will be expected to support their defense according to the reading thus far.

Concluding Summary, Directions, Caution, etc.

Length of the paper should be approximately 2-4 pages. It does not have to be typed

Write paper according to correct grammar, punctuation, organization, and spelling rules.

Assignment

Read Lindbergt's "Flight Across the Atlantic" from text

Creative Presentation Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 7 of the unit plan Topic: Charles Lindberg's
"Flight Across the
Atlantic"

Learning Objectives

Students will gain a working knowledge of the existential idea of self

Students will learn a different perspective on the historical flight of Charles Lindberg--they will be taken "inside the cockpit"

Students will be able to distinguish between a historical account of a particular event and an existential, experiential account.

Motivation

I will attempt to motivate the students by telling them that I am going to "take them away from the classroom" today. In other words, I will use an attention-getting technique.

Procedure

I will first ask the students to write responses to the following questions:

1. Where are you most often when you are by yourself for long periods of time?
2. What is usually your mindset when you are alone at these times? (lonely, sad, contemplative, happy, peaceful, etc.)
3. What do you most often think of at these times?
4. Are you ever moved to think about your "self"--are you ever moved beyond your surroundings and the confines of the world?

I won't collect these responses but will allow them to serve as a springboard into Lindberg's account of his trip. Then, together we will turn to his essay.

1. Under what conditions does Lindberg write this essay?
2. How does he describe his position as he crosses the Atlantic?
3. Do these contribute to his mindset?
4. At what point does he begin to realize the multi-levels of his consciousness, his self?
5. What does he indicate is the separation?
6. What does this account do in terms of confirming the existentialist view of the self?

Assignment

No assignment for tomorrow

Creative Presentation Plan

Course: Honors Humanities

Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 8 of the unit

Topic: Examination of the
Self through differing
existential views

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize from visual representation the different existential views
- Students will recognize the invalid descriptions depicted by the visual aids presented.
- Students will refine their abilities to apply the existential foundations to other areas in class

Arrangements

The visual aids will be located at the front of the class on large poster-board so that everyone can see them clearly.

Motivation

Students generally love cartoons or anything visually stimulating. Today's lesson won't need a great deal of motivation from my standpoint because students will be anxious to see what they will be doing with the visual aids.

Materials

A large cardboard poster-board with the following cartoon series:

1. A caveman type caricature with a mallet type tool in his hand. A huge rock, representing self, will also be in the frame. The caveman will begin to pound on the rock and big jagged sections will chip off. He continues to try to "get at" the center of the rock, but as he continues to hammer out the jagged sections, he gets to the center only to see that the entire structure crumbles apart; it is now worthless.
2. The scenario is basically the same--only the man is more thoughtful about his strokes against the rock. As he gently works to find the center, he turns the rock into a small, smooth circle. He feels good about this and is happy with what he has done. He does continue trying to perfect his circle in remaining frames.
3. This third man will not even attempt to do anything to the rock, but will walk away indifferently.

Procedure

I will show the strips one at a time asking the students to describe what they think is represented in terms of "self."

How does the person view his life in the strip? What kinds of decisions do you think he makes, etc? I will hope that they will come to approximately the following conclusions:

1. Represents the nihilistic view of life. No matter what a person does, it will end negatively. We will all die regardless of the decisions we make so what does it matter what we do. We will never find true meaning in anything.
2. Represents the man who sees life as an ongoing, never ending process of delicate, often life-changing decisions. If the person lives authentically, meaning (the smooth circle) can be found.
3. Represents the man who is unauthentic in all that he does. He does not even care to approach life in any way.

Then I will encourage them to recognize the negative or invalid aspect of these representations.

1. Life cannot be separate from consciousness, from the body lest it become an abstraction. We cannot objectify our lives to this extent.

Assignment

Read "Freedom" by Gordon Allport in text.

Presentation Plan

Course: Senior Honors Humanities

Teacher: Tiffany Smith

Date: Day 9 of unit plan

Topic: The concept of freedom

Learning Objectives

Students will see the crucial role of freedom in existential thought

Students will recognize that the self-knowledge addressed in "Sense of Self" may lead to a relative freedom

Students will recognize that along with freedom comes responsibility

Motivation

This will be a difficult essay for the students, and I know they will probably need some guidance after reading it. I will tell them that in order to simplify the concepts, I will spend the lesson time covering the very essential points from this article. I will also remind them that they have an exam tomorrow and this material will be included in the exam.

Arrangements

I will use the overhead projector today in order to best display the points in written form for students to copy.

Points to be covered (pulled directly from the text)

1. It is common sensical to believe in freedom.
2. Existentialism insists on freedom; psychology emphasizes a concern for choices, so they must address freedom.
3. Differences between omniscient being and acting person as indicated by Allport in "Freedom."
4. Psychology concedes that self-knowledge may lead to a relative freedom.
5. A person widely experienced and knowing many courses of conduct has many more degrees of freedom.
6. If the acting person considers his actions in the framework of "on the whole," he opens new pathways of decision.
7. If the acting person is able to "bracket out" certain non-consequential factors, it leaves him free to be himself.

I will elaborate on each of these points, and I will take questions as they come during the presentation.

Assignment

Study for exam.

HONORS HUMANITIES
EXAM I
MISS SMITH

ANSWER TWO OF THE FOLLOWING THREE ESSAY QUESTIONS. ANSWER EACH AS FULLY AND COMPLETELY AS YOU CAN IN THE TIME ALLOWED.

1. Describe the narrative techniques used in "I'm a Fool" by Sherwood Anderson. Be sure to include how this enables the reader to see Andy in a very particular light. Also, tell how Anderson masterfully allows Andy to reveal his perceptions of other people.
2. How does family life or home in general contribute to your perceptions of the world? How do those "people" in your family serve to ground many of your lifetime experiences?
3. Arthur Miller, in his essay, "The Shadows of the Gods," says that something "becomes beautiful because it promises to remove some of my helplessness before the chaos of experience." How does this relate to Allport's idea of "bracketing out" certain unrelated segments in our lives in order to free ourselves, or does it? Can literature serve to enrich and solidify our experience? If so, how?